

The Role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Encouraging Entrepreneurial Culture among Students

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The field of entrepreneurship receives the attention of all stakeholders, especially the Ministry of Higher Education (KPT) to ensure that superior human capital that has strong entrepreneurial characteristics and can create jobs for others can be born in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) according to the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2015-2025 (Higher Education) or PPPM (PT) 2015-2025. In 2021, it was found that a total of 93,352 students had ventured into entrepreneurial or business activities throughout their studies at HEI, which contributed to an increase of 35 percent compared to 68,937 students in 2020 (Kosmo, 10 September 2022). This shows that the field of entrepreneurship is gaining important foothold among higher education students during their study period.

The Ministry of Higher Education (KPT) has spent almost RM43 million to make the entrepreneurship agenda at HEIs successful since 2016 through the HEI Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2021-2025 (Bernama, 13 October 2023). Moreover, KPT also recorded more than 40,000 students at Public Institutes of Higher Education (IPTA) who made entrepreneurs their chosen career after graduating, for example, there are about 22,000 student entrepreneurs who have gained exposure and run businesses during their studies in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) (Bernama, 13 October 2023).

Several studies have found that interest with attitude, motivation, knowledge and personal skills are significant factors that can contribute to involvement in entrepreneurial activities during studies (Hashim et al., 2022, Ali Amaran & Hamzah, 2021). Moreover, it cannot be denied that getting additional income is also one of the motivating factors for becoming a student entrepreneur. The money earned can be used to cover expenses on campus and can even be shared with their families as a means of subsistence.

Abu Sa'eed narrated that the Prophet SAW said:

"The truthful, trustworthy merchant is with the Prophets, the truthful, and the martyrs."
(al-Tirmizi, 1209)

The above hadith shows the noble position that is awarded to entrepreneurs if they do business with honesty, trust, fairness and other good business ethics and principles. When the application of these noble values is practiced by student entrepreneurs, a balanced and holistic human capital can be achieved (Abdullah & Abd Majid, 2022).

How can HEIs foster entrepreneurial interest among students?

1. Obliging every student to register the entrepreneurship course

Malaysia has mandated compulsory entrepreneur courses for all HEIs' students to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset which aligned with the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2015-2025 (Higher Education) (Suib et al., 2024). Students need to register and pass this entrepreneurship course to graduate. These academic courses provide foundational education and knowledge regarding the entrepreneurial field for students to learn their first step in starting a business (Lim et al., 2024).

This indirectly plays an important role in channelling information about the field of entrepreneurship to all students and drawing students' interest by providing assignments that can increase students' motivation to delve into this field (Ali Amaran & Hamzah, 2021, Hashim et al., 2022, Lim et al., 2024). Among the main entrepreneurship courses at UiTM are ENT300 – *Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship* for diploma level students and ENT530 – *Principles of Entrepreneurship* for undergraduate level students (UiTM Curriculum Management, 2024).

2. Nurturing the entrepreneurial culture on campus

Creating entrepreneurial opportunities such as providing business kiosks in student focus areas such as lecture areas, dormitory areas, student activity areas and so on are also strategies to nurture the entrepreneurial culture on campus by HEIs. These business opportunities will allow student entrepreneurs to gain invaluable entrepreneurial knowledge (Lim et al., 2024). They learn to manage a business, deal with suppliers and customers, set prices and strategizing on how to ensure that their kiosks make good sales continuously while balancing and managing their time for learning (Ali Amaran & Hamzah, 2021).

HEIs need to provide continuous opportunities for students to do small scale business. When many kiosks or any business opportunities are opened around the campus, it will become a culture or habit for students to continue to become entrepreneurs in campus (Hashim et al.,

2022). However, HEIs need to make regular monitoring to ensure that the kiosk runs smoothly and benefits students who are doing business and students who become the customers.

3. Exposure to continuous entrepreneurial knowledge

Exposure to the field of entrepreneurship has a significant influence on generating and fostering students' interest in deciding to become an entrepreneur (Ali Amaran & Hamzah, 2021, Lim et al., 2024). Each HEI has a unit or department responsible for managing entrepreneurial activities, for example the 'Malaysian Academy of SME & Entrepreneurship Development' (MASMED) at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). MASMED with the goal of 'Transforming life through entrepreneurship'. MASMED provides various programs in the form of knowledge sharing, improving skills such as the 'YOUTUBEpreneurs' program, idea and product innovation competitions, as well as various programs that give added value to students who are new to the world of entrepreneurship (MASMED, 2024). HEIs' continuous efforts have a great impact on students' interest in becoming entrepreneurs while still in their studies.

4. Organizing entrepreneurial competitions

Entrepreneurship competitions that offer financial rewards or other recognition can also attract students to venture into the field of entrepreneurship while on campus (Lim et al., 2024). These competitions can highlight the products or services traded by student entrepreneurs to the public. In addition, it can also provide recognition to the results of the entrepreneurs' efforts when they win the awards. In fact, if the reward is in the form of monetary, it can help to increase business capital and contribute to a better cash flow. These student entrepreneurs will be more excited to improve their personal and business performance to become more competitive.

5. Establishment of entrepreneurial support groups among student entrepreneurs

The influence of friends is an important factor in fostering students' interest in becoming entrepreneurs during their studies. An entrepreneurial support group can be established as a reference partner for new student entrepreneurs if they need advice while running their business. This support group should consist of student entrepreneurs who have experience in business and have been given a coaching course in entrepreneurship (Lim et al., 2024). Various activities can be carried out together to build unity between student entrepreneurs. Moreover, this support groups are able to provide peer-to-peer communal and social support, knowledge transfer between seniors and juniors and expansion of networking (Lim et al., 2024). This support system is vital to ensure the continuity of the business run by these entrepreneurs in addition to making it easier for the HEIs to monitor.

6. Provide financial assistance to student entrepreneurs

The entrepreneurship fund provided by the HEIs also plays an important role in facilitating these student entrepreneurs for the smooth running of their business. Their interest will be nurtured when they feel that there is a party that is their universities that provides strong support when they needed financial help during the start-up (Ali Amaran & Hamzah, 2021). The financial aid provided can be given in the form of (1) no need for payback but a simple financial report must be sent for monitoring, (2) a flexible plan where there is no need for payback if the student entrepreneur succeeds in improving business performance to a specified level and must

send a simple financial report (Ali Amaran & Hamzah, 2021). With this, student entrepreneurs will be educated to always be responsible for the fund received. In addition, this can simultaneously teach student entrepreneurs to be more mature in making decisions.

"...And help each other in (doing) virtue and piety, and do not help each other in committing sins and enmity. Fear Allah, truly, Allah is very severe in His punishment."

(Surah Al Maidah, 2)

In conclusion, student entrepreneurs are considered as a special group that should be given constant attention. This is because the businesses that they run during their studies not only provide them with income for survival as students, but also hone their skills for self-management, time-management, doing business and learning to become a well-balanced student cum entrepreneurs. The above Al-Quran verse clearly says that helping each other for the good of the whole is highly demanded. The efforts that have been made by HEIs are very significant to ensure that this field of entrepreneurship has a place in the hearts of students. Success can only be achieved if all parties join forces to help student entrepreneurs. Let us nurture and foster the culture of entrepreneurship among students by giving support to every program provided by the HEIs.

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